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5 OF 6

PARENTAL ADVISORY

The Night Has Come

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PREVIOUSLY IN THE STAND

Months ago, a flu-like virus swept the globe, killing off 99% of the world's population. Those who survived were left to piece together a new life—and establish the new order.

Some have united in cautious hope and established the Boulder Free Zone, in Colorado. In Las Vegas, conversely, the Dark Man known as Randall Flagg has presided over his army of followers, rebuilding and preparing for war.

Four men from the Free Zone—Glen, Ralph, Larry and Stu—set off to make their final stand against their adversary Flagg. But an accident left Stu with a broken leg, unable to continue. The other three reluctantly marched on, while Stu stayed behind with Glen's faithful dog, Kojak.

Approaching Vegas, Glen, Ralph, and Larry are captured by Flagg's forces. But when Glen refuses to bow to Flagg's authority, Flagg orders his execution.

The following day, all of Las Vegas gathers for Ralph and Larry's execution. The two resolve to confront their fates without fear, but first they must watch in horror as Flagg kills a dissenter with an electrical current that he—somehow magically—generates from within himself.

With energy still crackling around him, Flagg encounters one last unwelcome surprise. His former servant, The Trashcan Man, charges into the crowd and presents Flagg with the "gift" of a nuclear weapon, which he hopes will redeem him from earlier, disastrous mistakes.

But Flagg's electricity escapes his control and distends into a hand that reaches toward the explosive. Larry and Ralph recognize this "Hand of God" and its purpose, and welcome it with relief. When the hand finally makes contact, Las Vegas—and everyone in it—is extinguished.



It was the final irony:

Stu Redman had the flu, or something very like it.

Two (three?) days after Larry, Glen, and Ralph had left him, he was feeling... very bad, indeed. (I'm going to die, aren't I?) Shivering, running a fever...

With a stub of pencil he found in his pockets, he wrote Frannie about everything that had happened...

...up to his broken leg.

I expect you to mourn me and then get on, You and the baby. HAVE to get on. That's the most important thing now...

He wrote that he wanted to see her again, but the most he could hope for at this point was that Kojak find his way back to the Zone.

He coughed, fretting at the swellings high on his neck, just under his jaw.

Life sure is a bitch--isn't it, boy?

Then Stu lay back, splintered leg in front of him, and dozed...

...and awoke with a start, an hour later, the ground moving slowly under his hands.

--earthquake? We got an earthquake here?

It felt, to Stu, as if God had suddenly stamped his foot on the desert floor.

On the western edge of the wash-out, Kojak was hunkered down, staring towards Nevada.

A sudden feeling of surety washed over Stu: What had been meant to happen was happening. Right now. And he had to see.

Kojak?
Kojak, I'm going up, boy...

The last three days, Stu hadn't seen the point of climbing out. In the gully, he was sheltered from the worst of the wind and had water, at least.

But now...he had to get up there and see.

Never gonna make it....

Warm, Stu thought. Too warm. I'm burning up!

He assumed it was the fever coming up again--

--except Kojak was hot and panting, too.

Overhead, a squadron of birds flocked, squawking in terror.

Whatever it is, Stu thought. The birds feel it, too...

Fear lent him additional strength. An hour passed, two. He fought for every foot, every inch.

By one o'clock, he was only six feet below the edge, but the grade was smooth and steep, and Stu was--

Stuck. Good %&ing show. Now what, genius?

Beneath him, the earth was beginning to crumble. He started to backslide...

Two inches... Five inches... (He would die in the gully; die without knowing--)

Kojak! Kojak!

Like a drowning man, Stu flung his arms around the dog, who started to drag him, panting like an air compressor...

The dog was digging for inches; pebbles rattled in Stu's face...

Four inches later, it was enough. With a desperate cry, Stu grabbed for an outcrop of pavement, which snapped off in his hands--

He grabbed another one--

--and two fingernails peeled back like wet decals.

The pain was exquisite, galvanizing--



The firestorm, he thought.

Someone fiddled when he should have fiddled, and one hellishly big nuclear weapon (from the look and feel of it) had gone off...

Glen, Larry, Ralph... Even if they hadn't reached Vegas yet, surely they'd been close enough to have been baked alive...

Fallout, he thought, which way is the wind going to blow it? Then: Did it matter?

His note to Fran. The Free Zoners needed to know that if Las Vegas had been the Park Man's staging area, it was GONE now. Flaga, and his people, and his weapons were... vaporized. Stu needed to add all that to the note...

But not now. He was too tired now. The climb had exhausted him; he felt only dull and grinding weariness...

His last conscious thought as he lay down on the concrete and drifted off to sleep was:

How many megatons...?

He awoke after seven. The mushroom cloud was gone, but the sky was still an angry, **poisonous pinkish-red**. And his fever, too; his blood was **boiling**.

With wood Kojak had fetched, Stu built a fire and cooked a rabbit the dog had caught.

As Stu bunked down for the night, he said to his companion:

When I die,
I want you to go
back to Boulder, boy...
You go back and find
Frannie and deliver my
note... Okay, you
big dumb dog?

Stu's sleep was light and uneasy, skimming in and out of delirium.

Hap! You
better turn off
y'pumps! He's coming! Park
Man's coming for you!
Better turn off y'pumps! He's
coming in that old car
yonder...

Through the night, Kojak whined uneasily. The Man had a **new** smell about him. The same smell that had been on the wolf he had disemboweled under Mother Abigail's porch.

The smell of death, and because it was **inside** the man, Kojak **couldn't** attack it. There was nothing to do but wait and see it through to the end...

In the middle of the night, Stu woke up more feverish than ever. The glands under his jaw had swollen to the size of golf balls. His eyes were hot as marbles.

I'm
dying...

"cough,
cough"

Yes, that's
affirmative...

Rhhurrh?

Behind Stu, the sound of rattling pebbles and stones. Someone-- something--was approaching.

It's him! He was in Vegas, but somehow he got away! Now he's here, and he means to do me in before the flu can!

Kojak's growl became stronger; his hackles stood on end--

A dark shape blotted out the stars--

Hey! Hey,
is that Kojak?
Is it?

The dog's growling stopped immediately--

He bounded forward joyfully, tail wagging--

No!
It's a trick!
Kojak!

But Kojak was jumping up and down on the figure--

Yip!

Yip!

YipyipYAPP!!

And there was something familiar about the shape...

Who is it?
Who's there?

Well, it's Tom Cullen, that's who, my laws, yes. M-O-O-N, that spells Tom Cullen. Who're you?

From somewhere far away, he heard himself say:

It's Stu, Tom, hello...

Good to see you...

THE NEXT DAY, OCTOBER SECOND.

Tom... Tom, I broke my leg
a week ago, maybe longer.
And I'm sick. With a fever.
So you need to listen
to me.

Tom's
listening. Just
tell me what
to do.

*Beneath the beard
he'd grown, Tom
looked somehow
brighter to Stu...*

*Was such a thing
possible?*

I've got to
knock down my
fever. *That's* the
first thing. I need
aspirin.

So start
walking up the
road. Look in the
glove-box of every
car you come to.
Look for a first-aid
kit--a box with a red
cross--and bring it
back, okay? Also, if
you find any camping
equipment like a
tent, bring *that*
back, too.

Sure,
aspirin and
a tent.

But Stu...
how's *Nick*? I've
been dreaming about
him and he tells me
where to go, because
in the dreams he can
talk. But when I try
to talk to him, he
looks away. Dreams
are funny,
aren't they?

Tom...I can't
talk about that,
not now. Just...
get the aspirin,
and then we'll
talk, okay?

*Fear settled over
Tom's face like a
gray cloud.*

Okay...

Kojak,
want to come
with Tom?

TWILIGHT.

Tom came back with a veritable jackpot. A bottle of Anacin. A dozen foil packages of freeze-dried concentrate food. And a huge, puffy sleeping bag.

Stu's head was buzzing at the center of his brain--the fever--but he had to tell Tom the truth:

Nick's dead.
Almost a month ago.
It was...a political thing.
Assassination, I guess
you could say.
I'm sorry.

For awhile, tears fell into Tom's lap. Then:

I...knew he was.
Laws, yes. He kept turning his back and going away. He was my *main man*, Stu. M-O-O-N, that spells my *main man*. I miss him something awful, but maybe I'll see him in heaven and he'll be able to talk and I'll be able to think--ain't that possible?

It wouldn't surprise me at all, Tom...

It was the bad man killed Nick, Tom knows. But God fixed the bad man. I saw it. The hand of God came down out of the sky...

Fixed him for what he did to Nick and the poor Judge.
Laws, yes.

What do you know about the Judge, Tom?

Dead! In Oregon! They shot him!

And Dayna? Know anything about her?

Tom saw her, but he doesn't know. She was up in the air, changing a bulb...and Tom *thinks* she saw him, but he never saw her again.

A cold wind whistled over the Utah badlands...

Tom, listen to me. I got to get inside and get some medicine into me soon or I'm going to die.

This is what needs to happen...

The next day, under a sky scummed over with clouds, Tom and Stu built a travois and set off in search of a car that would take them east.

Weak and sick as he was, Stu felt a mad sort of exultation; he was going to die--soon, probably--but at least he wasn't going to die alone in that muddy ditch.



Morning mist had thickened to a cold rain when they came across the Plymouth. It was old and rusted, but its four tires were inflated, which was more than Stu could say about the dozens of cars they'd already inspected.

A quick look under the hood confirmed that the battery was in not-too-bad shape.

If the keys are there and there's gas...this rattletrap may be our best chance of surviving, Tom.



The keys were there. And more than a quarter tank of gas.

Why? Stu wondered. Why had good ol' A.C. pulled over to walk when he could've driven?

In his fevered state, Stu thought of Charles Campion and his poor family, rolling into Kap's Amoco...



Stu conjectured: Old A.C. has the superflu, has it bad... Delirious, maybe hallucinating, A.C. pulls over and stumbles out into the badlands, cackling...

Four months later, Stu Redman and Tom Cullen happen along, and the keys are in the car, and the battery's fresh, and there's gas, and--

Pray this thing starts, Tom.



It did, by some miracle, and all Stu could think was: The hand of God... Maybe God had left this battered Plymouth for us, like manna in the desert...

It was a crazy idea, but no more crazy than a hundred-year-old woman leading a bunch of refugees into the promised land--

And she made her own biscuits, right up until the very end...



In the backseat, Kojak wagged his tail, happily. Before Captain Trips, when he had been Big Steve, the dog had often ridden in his master's car, and he thought it was nice to be riding again, with his new masters.



Buh-bye!
Buh-bye, we're going to Boulder, laws, yes!



I'd be content with Green River tonight, Stu thought--



What, Stu?

Never mind, Tom, we're going! We've got us some wheels now!





They got there just after dark. And bunked down in the lobby of the Utah Hotel. It was damp and cold, but Tom kindled a roaring blaze in the fireplace.

Stu was unconscious, muttering in his sleep--every now and then, he would scream something--while outside, the temperature kept dropping and gritty sleet started to slap at the windows...

(Far away in the west, the storm's outer edges were urging a vast cloud of radioactive pollution towards California, where more would die...)

At some time after two in the morning, a sleep-walking Tom Cullen rose from the sofa...



...and let himself out into the screaming, sleet-ing night.



The wind was a howling, endless ghost-train, highbaling it through the stormy sky, as Tom Cullen walked with his main man, Nick Andros.

I almost died from a scratch a bullet made along my leg. It wasn't deep, but it got infected, which means the bad germs got in...





Infection's the most dangerous thing there is, Tom. The superflu that killed everyone was like an infection. And an infection-- of the mind--is what made people want to make the superflu in the first place.

Laws...

Tom, Stu's got an infection now.



He has pneumonia in both lungs. He's been sleeping outside for two weeks. There are things you can and will do to help, but even still...Stu will almost certainly die.

No! You're scaring Tom Cullen, laws, yes, you are!



Tom, if it's God's will that Stu dies, you and Kojak have to get back to Boulder and tell them that you saw the hand of God in the desert. In the meantime...



...there are pills for infections in places like this.

What can I get you, sir?

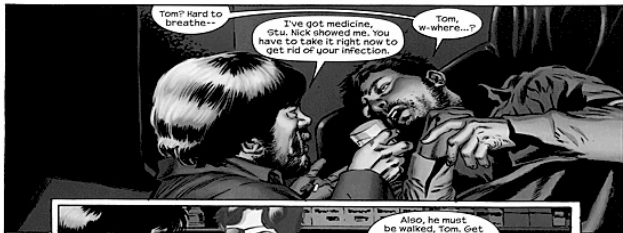


Tom was shocked to see they were no longer on the street, but in a darkened drugstore.

Nick?

Penicillin, very good for pneumonia.

Ampicillin. Amoxicillin. And V-cillin. And Vitamin C tablets. And he's to drink lots of water.



Stu's struggle with pneumonia lasted two weeks. Tom gave him medicine, kept him clean, kept fluids going in, kept hauling his broken, feverish body around the lobby of the hotel...



On October 7, Stu's entire body was soaked with sweat, but his forehead was cool.



He was sleeping more deeply than he had in days; his fever had finally snapped.

On October 13, Stu was sitting up, looking more like his old self.



Tom...I'm alive.

Yes.
Laws,
yes!



I'm hungry, Tom. Can you maybe rustle up some soup? With noodles in it?





By the 18th, Stu could get around the lobby on crutches Tom had found in the drugstore.

He felt a steady, maddening itch in his broken leg as the bones began to knit themselves together.



On October 20, Stu went outside for the first time. The day was warm and sunny, but there was a distinct undertone of coolness.

I think we can get to Grand Junction, but after that... I just don't know.

There's going to be a lot of snow in the mountains already.

Indeed, winter was almost close enough to touch.



On Halloween, they left Green River and headed east, just as it began to snow...



They reached Grand Junction on November 2--three hours before a massive snowstorm, as it turned out.

They set up shop in a Holiday Inn, until the spring thaw, if it came to that--though neither Tom nor Stu were sure they'd be able to wait that long to get home.



To pass the time, Stu worked out in the motel's gym...

...and screened movies with a projector and reels he'd found at the local movie theatre.

Time passed slowly, but not unpleasantly...

...except for the dream
Stu had started to have,
every night. The one about
Frannie's pregnancy.

The birth had been difficult and bloody--
a breech--and when the baby came
out, it was a wolf with a furious, grinning
human face, his face, it was Flagg...

Frannie had
given birth to
Randall Flagg...



It was decided as simple as that. And they left Grand Junction, via snowmobile, on the last day of November.



By December 13, they were nearly to Shoshone, climbing towards the roof of the Rockies, and Stu began to worry, in earnest, about avalanches.



During the day, they hunted deer; at night, they camped...



...while outside their tent, wolves gathered, and howled, and kept silent, terrible vigil. Waiting and watching.



Once, Tom slipped into his strange state of hypnosis:

The
wolves are
still his...

They
always will
be...

Tom...is
he dead? Do
you know?



"He never dies... He's in the wolves, laws, yes. And the crows...and the rattlesnakes..."

"In the shadows of the owl at midnight and the scorpion at high noon... He roosts upside down with the bats..."



That night, Stu did a mental calculation: Fran's baby was due sometime in...early January. He needed to be there when it came. He needed to see with his own eyes that it was all right...



On Christmas Eve, they camped on top of the snow crust twenty-four miles east of Avon, not too far from the choked-with-traffic Eisenhower Tunnel.

The thought that they were sitting less than two or three feet above God only knew how many dead bodies in God only knew how many cars unsettled Stu...



...and that night, he had a new nightmare. That both Frannie and her terrible wolf-child had died in childbirth, and that George Richardson was saying (from some great distance):

It's the flu. No more babies because of the flu. A chicken in every pot and a wolf in every womb. Mankind is done. Because of the flu.





Christmas morning was bright and sunny, and Stu woke up early to set up a little tree and cook breakfast.

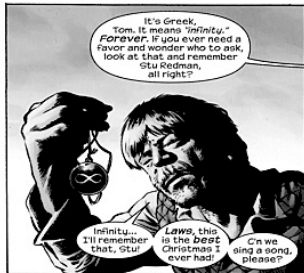
Merry Christmas, Tommy. Look under that tree there and you might find some presents from Santa Claus...

STU! Tom Cullen knows there's no Santa Claus! Laws, no!

Those gifts are from you!



Tom opened...a pinball machine, a sweatshirt that proclaimed, "I CLIMBED LOVELESS PASS," and a silver medallion with a strange symbol (Stu had found it in town).



It's Greek, Tom. It means "infinity." Forever. If you ever need a favor and wonder who to ask, look at that and remember Stu Redman, all right?

Infinity... I'll remember that, Stu!

Laws, this is the best Christmas I ever had!

C'n we sing a song, please?

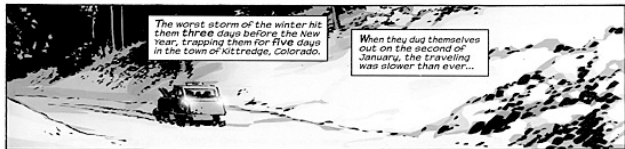


The first Noel, the angels did say...was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay...in fields...as they lay keeping their sheep...on a cold winter's night that was so deep...

Stu joined in on the chorus, both men's voices filling the deep cathedral silence of Christmas morning...



Shortly afterwards, they were under way again, traveling east and upwards, under the bright, cold Christmas sun...



The worst storm of the winter hit them three days before the New Year, trapping them for five days in the town of Kittredge, Colorado.

When they dug themselves out on the second of January, the traveling was slower than ever...



On the fourth of January, they came to the place where US 6 splits off from the turnpike to go its own way towards Golden...

...and, although neither of them knew it (there were no dreams or premonitions), that was the day that Frannie Goldsmith went into labor.



Then, on January seventh, they saw it:

What is it, Stu? It looks like a bridge...

Did we get on a river someplace, Stu?

It's the Golden overpass, Tom... That's 114 up there, the Boulder road...

We're only twenty miles from town, maybe less...



The next day, just after noon--both men feeling more anticipation than they ever had in their lives--the snowmobile began to hitch and lug...

(It turned out that--in his excitement to get home--Stu had forgotten to fill up the gas tank back in Golden.)

So they resolved to walk the rest of the way home.

Sorry, Tom, I was too damn excited, I guess...

How stupid is that?

They didn't make it to Boulder that day--the powdery snow slowed them to a literal crawl--so they camped that night, just outside Boulder, and Stu had another strange dream:

He dreamed he was in a summertime Boulder where all the lawns were yellow and dead from the heat and lack of water.

The town was deserted. They had all gone, even Tom. The only sound was an unlatched door, banging back and forth in the light breeze...

Frannie, Stu called...

...but his only answer was the wind and the sound of that door, banging slowly back and forth, back and forth...



Stu began to laugh.

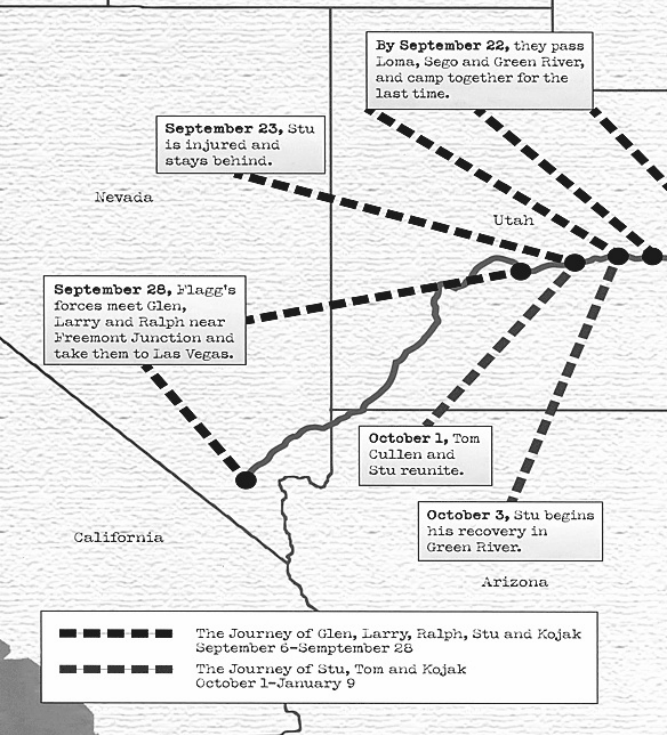


...let's get our bad selves home.



**NEXT:
THE END!**

From Boulder to Vegas and Back



Start here

The map shows a route starting in Wyoming, moving south through Colorado, and then into New Mexico. A solid line represents the main path, with several dashed lines branching off to specific locations. Text boxes provide dates and events along the way.

Wyoming

September 17, The men camp near Grand Junction, where Flagg's eye sees them.

September 6, The four men reach the Eisenhower Tunnel. The next day they find Harold's body.

September 6, Glen, Larry, Ralph and Stu leave Boulder on foot.

January 9, they spot the Boulder City Limits sign.

January 7, they spot the road to Boulder just before their snowmobile breaks down.

December 29, snow traps them in Kittredge.

November 2, Stu and Tom wait out the snow in Grand Junction.

December 25, Tom and Stu celebrate Christmas near Avon.

By December 13, they've set out again and approach Shoshone.

New Mexico

Colorado

SCRIPT TO FINAL

PAGE ONE.

PANEL ONE.

Back to Stu, where we last left him, Mike. A medium- or medium-long shot of him. He is in that gully, with his broken leg, exposed to the elements. He is propped up, sitting up. Contemplating what he's about to write in the little pad (with the little pencil) in his lap. (Which we don't have to necessarily see super-clearly in this panel.)

CAPTION: It was the final irony:

CAPTION: Stu Redman had the flu, or something very like it.

CAPTION: Two (three?) days after Larry, Glen, and Ralph had left him, he was feeling...very bad, indeed. (I'm going to die, aren't I?) Shivering, running a fever...

PANEL TWO.

A panel that shows us Stu on the left-hand side of the panel, Mike, then a CLOSE-UP on what he's writing on the right-hand side of the panel—a detail from his note, Mike, which reads: I expect you to mourn me and then get on. You and the baby have to get on. That's the most important thing now...

CAPTION: With a stub of pencil he found in his pockets, he wrote Frannie about everything that had happened...

CAPTION: ...up to his broken leg.

CAPTION: He wrote that he wanted to see her again, but the most he could hope for at this point was that Kojak find his way back to the Zone.

PANEL THREE.

Staying on Stu, on the left-hand side of the panel—but in profile—as he takes a break from his writing to feel his throat, his jaw, which is swollen from his flu. He is addressing Kojak, who is on the right-hand side of the panel, looking at Stu, wagging his tail worriedly.

CAPTION: He coughed, fretting at the swellings high on his neck, just under his jaw.

STU: Life sure is a bitch— isn't it, boy?

PANEL FOUR.

Pulling back so we see Stu—as the caption indicates—laying back against a rock—or the edge of the gully—and closing his eyes to rest, to sleep, 'cause he's so damn tired...

CAPTION: Then Stu lay back, splintered leg in front of him, and dozed...

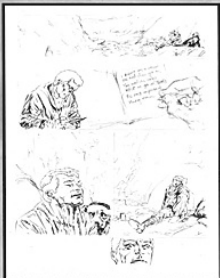
PANEL FIVE.

A close-up on Stu, his head/face still in profile, his eyes suddenly snapping open, as he's startled awake by...what? What just happened? He's very confused.

CAPTION: ...and awoke with a start, an hour later, the ground moving slowly under his hands.

STU: —earthquake? We got an earthquake here...?

CAPTION: It felt, to Stu, as if God had suddenly stamped his foot on the desert floor somewhere not too distant.



PAGE TWO.

PANEL ONE.

Swinging the camera, so that we're looking up (from Stu's POV) at Kojak, on the edge of the wash-out (like, he's climbed out of the wash-out, Mike), and is staring towards the west, rapt, hunkered down, tail between legs, seeing something he's never seen before.

CAPTION: On the western edge of the wash-out, Kojak was hunkered down, staring west, towards Nevada.

PANEL TWO.

Shifting the focus back on to Stu. For a sick dude, he is quite lively in this panel, calling for Kojak, already scrambling towards one of the gully's side, dragging himself along, like an extra from The Walking Dead, if that makes sense... He doesn't want to miss whatever's happening topside.

CAPTION: A sudden feeling of surety washed over Stu: What had been meant to happen was happening. Right now. And he had to see.

STU: Kojak? Kojak, I'm going up, boy...

PANEL THREE.

Looking down at Stu, as he starts to belly-crawl his way out of the gully, clawing for each handhold and foothold. (NOTE: He is crawling up the EASTERN side of the gully.) He is struggling, especially since his one leg is just dead weight. Kojak, meantime, seeing that Stu is finally (after days) moving, has bound (is bounding) down the side of the gully, towards Stu...

CAPTION: The last three days, Stu hadn't seen the point of climbing out. In the gully, he was sheltered from the worst of the wind and had water.

CAPTION: But now...he had to get up there and see.

STU: Never gonna make it...

PANEL FOUR.

Now we're in front of Stu, looking into his face. He is sweating profusely. From the fever, from the effort...but also because it is suddenly much, much hotter. Kojak, next to him, keeping pace with his master, is also sweating and panting. In the moment this panel is capturing,

CAPTION: Warm, Stu thought, Too warm. I'm burning up!

CAPTION: He assumed it was the fever coming up again—

CAPTION: —except Kojak was hot and panting, too.

PANEL FIVE.

Cutting to: A shot of the sky from Stu's POV. And a huge flock of dark, little birds is flying east, away from...the happening...

CAPTION: Overhead, a squadron of birds flocked, wheeling aimlessly and squawking in terror.

CAPTION: Whatever it is, Stu thought, the birds feel it, too...



PAGE THREE.

PANEL ONE.

Another shot looking at Stu as he climbs/shimmies, Spider-Man-style, up the steep grade, struggling (as the caption tells us) for every foot, every inch. (NOTE: This sequence is the issue in microcosm, Mike, so let's have Stu really sweating it out.) Kojak is next to Stu, bobbing around him, easily, wishing his master would hurry the eff up...

CAPTION: Fear leant him additional strength. An hour passed, two. He fought for every foot, every inch.

CAPTION: By one o'clock, he was only six feet below the edge, but the grade was smooth and steep, and Stu was—

PANEL TWO.

Another shot looking down, directly into Stu's face. Frustrated 'cause he can't get any further along, up the hill. In fact, not only that, but he's started to slide down the hill, backwards, because the ground is eroding, beneath him...

STU: Stuck. Good %&@ing show. Now what, genius?

CAPTION: Beneath him, the earth was beginning to crumble. He started to backslide...



PANEL THREE.

Looking down on Stu, on his back. His hands clawing for something to hang on to, carving grooves into the earth—the soil—as gravity pulls him ever backwards... He's desperately trying to keep moving forwards, clutching at the loose soil. Kojak, a few feet/yards away from him, is looking at Stu, wagging his tail eagerly, worried about his master. Stu, in his desperation, is calling for the dog...

CAPTION: Two inches... Five inches... (He would die in the gully; die without knowing—)

STU: Kojaki! Kojaki!

PANEL FOUR.

Kojak has come up next to Stu, who (in a "Hail Mary" moment of desperation) has flung his arms around the dog's neck and upper body; the dog which has literally started to drag Stu up the hill, towards the top—and towards us, the readers. It is a herculean effort/push to get to the top, so however you can capture that strain, Mike— NOTE: The dog is kicking up a lot of rocks and dirt, so let's make this as dirty and messy a moment as possible...

CAPTION: Like a drowning man, Stu flung his arms around the dog, who started to drag him, panting like an air compressor...

CAPTION: The dog was digging for inches; pebbles rattled in Stu's face...

PANEL FIVE.

A few moments—beats—later. Close enough to the lip of the page, Stu is flinging himself off of Kojak to grasp (as the caption tells us) an outcropping of pavement, so he can pull himself up and out of the pit. In the moment this panel is capturing, the pavement is breaking off... And Stu is gasping at the effort involved, by the way; it's taking everything out of him—

CAPTION: Four inches later, it was enough. With a desperate cry, Stu grabbed for an outcrop of pavement, which snapped off in his hands—

PANEL SIX.

A variation on Panel Five, a beat later, but more of a close-up on Stu—his face a mask of agony, Mike, as he grabs for another outcropping of concrete, throwing so much weight on his hands (and so recklessly, grabbing the outcropping's edge) that TWO OF HIS FINGERNAILS peel right the hell off, which is the absolute horrific focus of this panel.

CAPTION: He grabbed another one—

STU: AAARRRRGGGGHHH!

CAPTION: —and two fingernails peeled back like wet decals.

CAPTION: The pain was exquisite, galvanizing—



PAGE FOUR.

PANEL ONE.

The first of two small panels at the top of the page, Mike. We're looking down on Stu, who has somehow managed to pull himself up and over the edge of the wash-out. And is now lying flat on his back, on the concrete highway, panting, totally spent, hacking up a storm, a sweaty mess. Kojak by his side, licking at his master's face...

CAPTION: —and somehow...he made it.

STU: Oh, my God...

CAPTION: He lay panting on the surface of I-70, Kojak beside him, whining and licking Stu's face.

PANEL TWO.

Another smallish panel, sir. Stu has sat up, coughing and wheezing, and turned towards the west. Both he and Kojak are just staring out—towards the west—in awe. Their hair being pushed backwards, in a blustering blast of warm air coming from...

CAPTION: Slowly, then, he sat up and turned west.

STU: Look at that, Kojak...

CAPTION: Oblivious to the heat that was rushing against him in fat, bloated waves, Stu looked for a long time...



PANEL THREE.

From Stu's POV: The mushroom cloud over Vegas, Mike. Swirling and fuzzy. Already starting to dissipate. Like a big, angry fist against the orange-red-toxic sky...

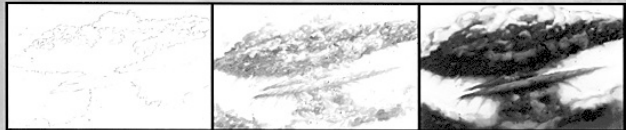
CAPTION: The firestorm, he thought.

CAPTION: Someone fiddled when he should have fiddled, and one hellishly big nuclear weapon (from the look and feel of it) had gone off...

CAPTION: Glen, Larry, Ralph... Even if they hadn't reached Vegas yet, surely they'd been close enough to have been baked alive...

CAPTION: Fallout, he thought. Which way is the wind going to blow it? Then: Did it matter?

CAPTION: His note to Fran. The Free Zoners needed to know that if Las Vegas had been the Dark Man's staging area, it was gone now. Flagg, and his people, and his weapons were... vaporized. Stu needed to add all that to the note...



PANEL FOUR.

The first of two panels at the bottom of the page. Looking at Stu, as he looks at the off-panel mushroom cloud. He looks...weary. His eyelids are drooping. Of course the last thing he should do is sleep—that's ridiculous—but he's so tired... (Kojak, if we see him in this panel, is looking at his master, quizzically.)

CAPTION: But not now. He was too tired now. The climb had exhausted him; he felt only dull and grinding weariness...

PANEL FIVE.

A panel that echoes back to Panel One. Stu has laid back down on the concrete, flat on his back; his eyes are almost completely closed, as he slips into unconsciousness...

CAPTION: His last conscious thought as he lay down on the concrete and drifted off to sleep was:

CAPTION: How many megatons...?



PAGE FIVE.

PANEL ONE.

Cut to: Later that day, Mike—sunset, in fact. The craziest sunset ever, so let's showcase the sky as much as possible. Pink and red and orange and highly, highly TOXIC. Small in the panel, we see Stu, sitting on the ground, with Kojak, a little fire in between them. Stu is cooking/has cooked a rabbit he is sharing with Kojak... (And we don't have to see this transaction in any detail, Mike, it's more about the apocalyptic feel of the panel...)

CAPTION: He awoke after seven. The mushroom cloud was gone, but the sky was still an angry, poisonous pinkish-red. Stu's shakes were back, worse than ever. And his fever. His blood was boiling.

CAPTION: With wood Kojak had fetched, Stu built a fire and cooked a rabbit the dog had caught.

PANEL TWO.

An hour later. It's darker, Mike. Night has just fallen. The fire has burned down lower, so that it's barely a cinder now. Tighter on Stu and Kojak. They are filling the panel more. Stu is rubbing the back of Kojak's ears, instructing his faithful servant....

CAPTION: As Stu bunked down for the night, he said to his companion:

STU: When I die, I want you to go back to Boulder, boy... You go back and find Frannie and deliver my note... Okay, you big dumb dog?

PANEL THREE.

An hour later, again. It's darker, again. Night-time. Looking down on: Stu, asleep, on his back, or curled up into a more fetal position, Mike. He is sweating, in the throes of a fever-dream, tossing and turning, hallucinating...

CAPTION: Stu's sleep was light and uneasy, skimming in and out of delirium.

STU: Hap! You better turn off y'pumps! He's coming! Dark Man's coming for you! Better turn off y'pumps! He's coming in that old car yonder...



PANEL FOUR.

Pull back so we see our players in profile. Stu, curled, asleep, in his delirium. Then the remains of the fire, perhaps smoking the tiniest bit, then Kojak, on his tummy, whining, looking at Stu, worriedly...

CAPTION: Through the night, Kojak whined uneasily. The Man had a new smell about him. The same smell that had been on the wolf he had disemboweled under Mother Abigail's porch.

CAPTION: The smell of death, and because it was inside the man, Kojak couldn't attack it. There was nothing to do but wait and see it through to the end...

PANEL FIVE.

Cut to—later that night. Stu, sweating, shivering, has sat up. A worn blanket wrapped around his shoulders for warmth. He is feeling his throat, trying to self-diagnose. Very worried. That's on the left. On the right-hand side of the panel, Kojak has stood up on all fours, at attention, and is looking at something off-panel, as whatever it is approaches Stu (off the left-hand side of the panel).

CAPTION: In the middle of the night, Stu woke up more feverish than ever. The glands under his jaw had swollen to the size of golf balls. His eyes were hot as marbles.

STU: I'm dying...

STU: *cough, cough*

STU: Yes, that's affirmative...

KOJAK: Rhhrhrrh



PAGE SIX.

PANEL ONE.

Coming up behind Stu, as he twists around, to look over his shoulder, at whomever—or whatever—is approaching him. Fearing that it's Flagg, Stu looks scared shitless, his eyes saucer-big. On the right-hand side of the panel, also looking towards whoever/whatever's approaching, Kojak is in an aggressive, growling stance—and scared, too. Thinking it's a wolf or something like a wolf, approaching...

CAPTION: Behind Stu, the sound of rattling pebbles and stones. Someone—something—was approaching.

CAPTION: It's him! He was in Vegas, but somehow he got away! Now he's here, and he means to do me in before the flu can!

CAPTION: Kojak's growl became stronger; his hackles stood on end—

PANEL TWO.

Flip it around so that we're looking at what Stu and Kojak are looking at, which—a dark, hulking shape, Bigfoot-like, striding up to Stu and Kojak... (NOTE: There's something vaguely familiar about the shape's lumpiness...)

CAPTION: A dark shape blotted out the stars—

SHAPE: Hey! Hey, is that Kojak? Is it?

PANEL THREE.

Back to Stu and Kojak, only Kojak is now (as the caption indicates) bounding forward, passing Stu (even as he reaches for the dog from his sitting position), happily, eager to greet whoever is approaching, as if he were an old friend—

CAPTION: The dog's growling stopped immediately—

CAPTION: He bounded forward joyfully, tail wagging—

STU: No! It's a trick! Kojak!

PANEL FOUR.

A panel that shows all of our players in profile. From left to right, we have the hulking shape, then Kojak, who is eagerly jumping all over the hulking shape, as if the dog had just been reunited with his long-lost master.

CAPTION: But Kojak was jumping up and down on the figure—

KOJAK: Yip!

KOJAK: Yip!

KOJAK: YippyYAPP!

CAPTION: And there was something familiar about the shape...

STU: Who is it? Who's there?

PANEL FIVE.

Focusing on the figure, from the off-panel Stu's POV. Looking at the figure from the chest- or waist-up. Kojak, standing on his hind legs, is resting his two front paws on the figure's chest and licking the figure's face,

which is more visible because of the way it's catching the light. And though he has a beard and a suntan, and looks a bit older and wiser, there's no mistaking...Tom-friggin'-Cullen!

TOM: Well, it's Tom Cullen, that's who, my laws, yes. M-O-O-N, that spells Tom Cullen. Who're you?

PANEL SIX.

Shifting the camera around so that we're looking at Stu from Tom's point of view. He is exhausted, stunned, ecstatic, doubting his senses. Totally dazed and amazed at the absurdity of it all...

CAPTION: From somewhere far away, he heard himself say:

STU: It's Stu, Tom, hello...

STU: Good to see you...



Tomm Coker's Cover Sketches

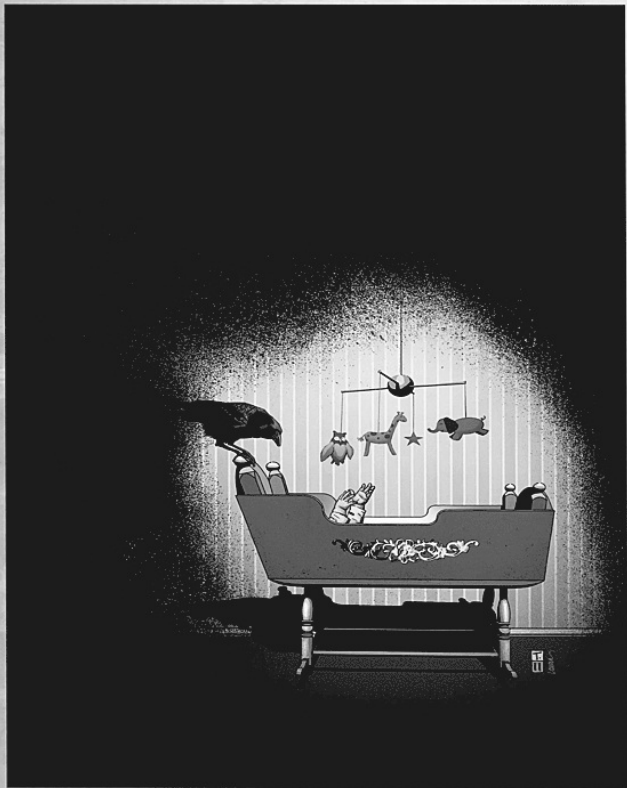


Initial
Sketch



Final
Sketch

Next: "Pray for all of us..."



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